

VZCZCXRO1867

RR RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHPG #0351 0921422
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 021422Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8839
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0090

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 000351

SIPDIS

NOFORN
SIPDIS

EUR/NCE FOR ERIC FICHTE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2017

TAGS: PREL KDEM CU EZ
SUBJECT: CZECH MFA: CZECHS REMAIN COMMITTED TO CHANGE IN
CUBA

REF: A. PRAGUE 0057

1B. PRAGUE 0350

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Mike Dodman
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C/NF) MFA Director of the Department of Americas Jakub Skalnik invited Poloff to the MFA on March 16 to discuss Czech policy on Cuba. During the discussion, Skalnik took great pains to reiterate that only the style of Czech policy -- not the substance -- has changed (as previously reported ref A). Skalnik explained that the Czechs will continue to work closely with like-minded EU member states (e.g., the Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, and Hungary) to negotiate a EU mid-term strategy on Cuba.

12. (C) The Czech government and NGOs continue to advocate change within the EU, and provide assistance to the democratic opposition and their families in Cuba. Recent examples include:

-- The Czech Republic supports the German presidency's proposal to draft a policy paper on Cuba that would (1) offer ways EU member states can support the Cuban democratic opposition, and (2) criticize the human rights abuses of the Cuban regime. The Czech delegation to the February COLAT meeting opposed the position of Italy at that meeting. (According to Skalnik, Italy argued that the COLAT did not have a mandate to draft such a position paper.)

-- Czech NGO International Committee for Democracy in Cuba will host a conference on Cuba in Berlin April 24-26 to build support among other EU member states for a mid-term position on Cuba. On April 26, Czech FM Karel Schwarzenberg is expected to make his first official statement on Cuba.

-- In 2007, the Czech MFA Transformation Cooperation Unit (TRANS) will provide funding for a new Czech NGO working in Cuba, and continue funding Czech NGO People in Need (PIN). TRANS funding for Cuba-related projects will increase in 2008 and 2009.

-- Funded in part by TRANS, PIN continues to send messengers to Cuba on a monthly basis to meet with dissidents, deliver material assistance, and provide training. PIN hopes to expand its efforts in cooperation with DRL. Specifically, PIN plans to launch a program to train NGOs from other EU countries. The goal is to send volunteers (including parliamentarians) from these NGOs to Cuba to supplement PIN's efforts assisting dissidents. After traveling to Cuba, these volunteers could also educate EU officials about conditions on the island.

-- In response to a request by the United States, the Czech MOI successfully resettled ten Cuban migrants in Prague in March 2007 (ref B).

¶3. (C) Comment. Since Skalnik first mentioned to us in January that the Czechs planned to take a lower-key approach toward Cuba, we have seen no change in the level of enthusiasm among Czech MFA officials and NGOs for promoting freedom in Cuba. We believe the above activities support Skalnik's claim that only the style, not the substance, of Czech efforts within the EU have changed. In addition, it is worth noting that FM Schwarzenberg was personally committed to helping Cuban dissidents long before he became foreign minister (he was detained, denied consular access, and expelled from Cuba during a visit to the island to meet with dissidents in March 2005), and we expect that FM Schwarzenberg will continue to be an ardent champion of freedom for Cuba within the Czech Republic and the EU. Nevertheless, the Czech MFA may benefit from U.S. feedback in due course on the efficacy of their new, lighter-touch approach. End comment.

GRABER